

**WHAT
UNI?**

A-LEVEL & BTEC EXAM SURVIVAL GUIDE



CONTENTS

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Introduction..... | 3 |
|-------------------|---|

Part 1

Prep Like a Pro: How to Rock Your Revision

| | |
|---|---|
| When Should You Start Revising..... | 5 |
| Getting the Most Out of Your Revision..... | 6 |
| Finding the Perfect Revision Technique..... | 9 |

Part 2

“You May Begin...”: How to Ace Each and Every Exam

| | |
|----------------------|----|
| Before the Exam..... | 13 |
| During the Exam..... | 13 |

Part 3

Keep Calm and Carry On... Revising: Managing Your Stress During Revision.....

16

Part 4

Beat the ‘Big Day’ Blues: Achieve Success, No Matter Your Results

| | |
|--|----|
| What If You Don’t Get Your Grades?..... | 20 |
| Myths About Clearing - Busted!..... | 21 |
| What If You Do Better Than You Hope?..... | 22 |
| Where Can You Find Available Courses During Clearing?..... | 22 |

INTRODUCTION

There's just one thing standing in between you and a long, hot (hopefully) summer of fun...

That's right - your A-Level exams! Or your BTEC exams, if that's the path you have taken.

Revising for, and taking, your A-Level or BTEC exams is really hard work. Long hours of studying, combined with the pressure that the results of these exams *actually* count towards securing your place at your chosen university = major stress-out!

And don't forget that alongside preparing for your upcoming exams, right now you have the added pressure of making your final uni choice, applying for your student loan and finding somewhere to live next year too.

Life is all of a sudden becoming very serious and very, very hectic. It's enough to make you want to break out the ice cream and bury yourself in a mix of denial and Netflix!

Here at Whatuni, we've spent a lot of time talking with sixth-formers, and know exactly what you are going through. And we feel your pain, we really do!

But while we can't do the revision and sit the exams for you, we do have the next best thing – this guide!

We hope you enjoy it and remember, Whatuni is here for you throughout your journey to university!



PART 1

PREP LIKE A PRO

How to Rock Your Revision

When Should You Start Revising?

Whatuni spoke to some real-life sixth formers to find out what they had to say on the matter...

Hope Macdonald

“ I would advise others to start revising around the same time I do – about a month in advance – because then you aren’t going to forget things you revised early on like you may do if you revise, say, two months in advance... ”

Joe Paddon

“ I normally start revising about late April, although throughout the year I make sure that I have put lots of effort into my work, so when I come to revise it’s a good revision source. ”

Amy Donnelly

“ I start revising probably about 3 weeks before (if it’s a real exam), although I regret not starting earlier every time (oops)... ”

Rachael Bradbury

“ After mocks I start to gradually revise and then increase the amount I do as exams get closer... Of course, you should revise as soon as possible, although a practical time is probably after mock exams, as then you have a taster of what the real thing will be like. ”

Georgie Bryant

“ I usually start revising a few weeks (not too long) before my exam as I find it hard to remember things and motivate myself without pressure. I plan to start revising a bit earlier this year, though, as I want to do well in my exams... ”

Emma Dyer

“ A hint I’d give others is to not compare/compete with others, as revision is personal, and what works best for you won’t necessarily work best for others! ”

Some really great advice from your fellow students on when to start revising. From what they tell us, 2-4 weeks before the exam is about right.

Getting the Most Out of Your Revision

So, now you know when to start your revision. But how should you go about it in the right way? And by the right way, we mean with maximum productivity and minimum stress! Here's our top tips for tackling the difficult task ahead...

1. Get Organised

The best way to ensure you stay on top of everything is by making a revision timetable. These can be easily created using an Excel spreadsheet, or if you are feeling arty you can draw it by hand. You can also download ready-made planners online from revision sites like getrevising.co.uk.

Splitting your revision into tiny little chunks will make it look much less scary and more achievable. Plus ticking off things as you learn them will motivate you as you'll see the progress you're making.



2. Download the Specification

The 4 major UK exam boards ([AQA](#), [Pearson](#), [OCR](#) and [WJEC](#)) all have their subject specifications openly available for you to download. Simply go to their website, find your chosen subject and download its specification.

This will help you understand everything you need to know, including how the exams are split and the weighting for each paper. They'll work as a nice roadmap for every exam paper you sit.

3. Take Breaks and Get Enough Rest

Scientific research has shown that we learn better when revising in little bits over a long period of time. So, make sure you give your poor brain a rest every so often, to maximise your learning.

Take your dog (or yourself) for a quick walk, check out what's happening on Insta, or just watch a bit of telly – whatever relaxes you and gets you ready for more learning.

Another thing... getting a good night's rest without disturbances is incredibly important. Your phone's light can actually disrupt you while you sleep so, as difficult as it may be, make sure to keep it out of sight. Sorry!



4. Practice Past Exam Papers

Past exam papers are also readily available on the exam board websites ([AQA](#), [Pearson](#), [OCR](#) and [WJEC](#)) a long with the mark schemes. These are a great indicator of what can come up but also show how the questions will be asked.

Download the last 4-5 exam papers and mark schemes and go over them using the mark scheme to correct your mistakes. Then do the papers again and again until you start to improve.

5. Turn Off Temptation

Smartphones and social media are super distracting, and it's far too easy to procrastinate on them when the other option is a task we really, really don't want to do.

If you don't trust yourself, you can take the choice out of your hands by using one of the many websites or apps that restricts your internet access. [Freedom](#) will shut off all your internet or phone access for a set amount of time.

6. Listen to Lyric-Free Music

Good news for music lovers; having your earphones in while studying can help you concentrate and make the task seem more fun. It's a good idea to avoid lyric-heavy tunes, however, as the words can be distracting.

7. Switch Places

If you study in the same place all the time, your visual, aural and sensory cues are the same for all the information you ingest. Switching things up creates variety in environmental prompts, and [associative memory](#) has been proven to be a powerful thing.

8. Revise in the Mornings, Not in the Evenings

Some people leave revision until the end of the day after school. But you're likely to be tired then, which makes understanding and remembering the information difficult.

Revising in the mornings (if you can) when you're refreshed allows the neurotransmitters in your brain to regain their sensitivity and consume information easier.

9. Chew Gum

Admittedly, this final tip is a little out there! But if you're feeling sleepy because you're reading a boring textbook, pop a stick of gum in your mouth. [Research](#) shows it makes us feel more awake. Plus, your study buddies will appreciate your minty fresh breath!

Finding the Perfect Revision Technique

Now, you might already have your revision techniques nailed from when you did your GCSEs. But if you feel that you could have done it better and that perhaps changing things up a little this time around could get you better results... then here's a list of different revision techniques that you can try out:

1. Take Notes – But Take Them the ‘Write’ Way

Ah writing out notes - the classic revision technique loved by millions of students. If this technique were an ice cream, it'd be vanilla. Classic, yes. A bit dull, yes. But it gets the job done.

If you are going to stick to writing notes when revising, then at least make sure you're taking notes in the best way: by hand. [Science has shown](#) that students who type up their notes on a laptop had more trouble recalling the information than their paper-and-ink peers. The logic is that because scribbling with a pen requires more effort we don't copy the info verbatim, and it's this shortcutting that helps the facts stick. Clever, huh?

“Copying out notes works best for me, because I can read over all the information and summarise it. This is what I've always done, purely because I'm not very creative in terms of revising! If I spend time making my notes look nice it just distracts me.”

Amy Donnelly, former sixth-form student

2. Make It More Visual

We all learn in different ways, but most study methods are strictly in the reading/writing style. Why not switch things up, engage some different senses, and make the whole thing much more fun in the process?

Creating posters, diagrams or even PowerPoint presentations to lay out complex information can help you take in the information much more easily than plain notes in good old blue or black ink too!

“I mainly revise by making PowerPoints and posters of all the sections, especially for psychology as it has set topic, explanations and research, etc. I find it easier to revise visually as I usually try and picture the poster/PowerPoint slide with the relevant info on when I'm in the exam.”

Beth Seymour, former sixth-form student

3. Use Record Cards

Flashcards are also a classic revision tool and for good reason: they work.

“I normally use flashcards as writing something out helps it stay in my mind, and then I can always look at it to refresh my memory.”

Mel Vijayakumar, former sixth-form student

4. Say It Out Loud

A good revision method is to describe what you are learning out loud, as well as explaining the meaning behind what you're learning.

It's all down to something called the Production Effect, where the process of 'producing' a piece of information, rather than simply observing it, improves your chances of retaining that material.

They may say that talking to yourself is the first sign of madness... but it could also be the first sign of a A* grade student, so give it a go!

5. Test Your Friends & Get Them to Test You

Get some friends round and have a revision-themed quiz. Who doesn't love some friendly competition? Don't get too big for your boots if you remember more than your mates do! No one like a 'Know-it-all'!



6. Watch YouTube Tutorials

YouTube is not just good for procrastination... You can use it to watch educational walkthroughs in pretty much all topics, and most will jazz them up a bit to really gain your attention.

7. Make Some Memes

In our modern era, anything can become a meme. Literally. So, switch it up a bit and link them to your revision, the jokes will be memorable and come to your mind in exam situations.

8. Have a Cue that Reminds You of a Topic

If you wear a certain top to revise history for example, wear that top to your exam. The same works with any jewellery and perfume or aftershave. It works as a trigger, and can bring back important info you need about a topic in your exam.



PART 2

“YOU MAY BEGIN...”

How to ace each and every exam

Before the Exam...

You've made it this far... so you don't want to go ruining all your hard work and preparation at the last minute. Here's Whatuni's top tips for exam day success:

1. Don't Fail to Prepare

We're talking here about things like knowing exactly when and where the exam is taking place; how long it will be; and what the rules regarding what equipment you can and can't take in with you are.

2. Get There Early

Make sure to leave home early and get to the exam hall with plenty of time to spare. The last thing you want is to have to deal with unforeseen traffic delays making you late, to add to your already rising blood pressure.

You can use the spare time to use the bathroom – and use it again! - and practice some breathing techniques to calm your nerves.

3. Don't Cram Right Up to the Last Minute.

Just accept that if you don't know it now you never will - the last hour should all be about relaxing yourself.

4. Avoid Panicky People.

They are not your friends right now – believe us!

During the Exam...

1. Stay Hydrated – But Don't Drink Too Much!

Taking sips of water will keep you hydrated and give you a few seconds throughout the exam to give your brain a break. Just don't go downing loads of water – or you'll end up needing the loo and that just wastes precious time.

2. Make Yourself Comfortable.

Make sure you sit comfortably in your exam. And while we are talking of comfort, make sure you wear comfortable clothes that aren't going to leave you too cold/hot and distracted. This is not the time for a fashion show!

3. Read the Questions Carefully.

And read them again to be sure! Write notes around the question, highlight important words within it – just make sure that you fully understand what they are asking of you.

5. Take Time to Plan Things Out

In an exam, timing is everything. And while you may want to dive right in and start answering questions straightaway, it will actually be beneficial to spend a few minutes reading through the questions and planning out how you will use your time.

For essay-based exams, it again pays to spend a few minutes planning out your answer and what you want to say. It will help you keep on track and avoid you losing your train of thought.



6. Start With the Easy Ones

As you are reading through the questions, some might jump out at you as being something you instantly remember, or you know you can do quickly and easily. Start with those easy ones and then go on to the ones you might have to work longer at.

You wouldn't want to spend a whole hour on one 3-mark question and then have no time left – when you could have used that hour to answer five 2-mark easy questions.

7. Just Write Anything

If you suddenly get an attack of brain freeze don't panic. Just start writing something and hopefully as you write your memory will come back.

If it's a maths or science exam and you have a tough equation or problem to solve, at the very least give it a go. You never know – even if you think it's wrong, it might be right. Writing something is always better than writing nothing.

8. Use All of Your Time.

If you finish with time to spare, don't think of it as an excuse to get home early. Use your remaining time to go over your answers and make sure you've answered the question properly.

9. Put Your Name On It.

You'll be surprised at how often students forget to do the most basic – yet most important – thing in any exam! Don't be one of those guys!

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a hand reaching into a library shelf to pick up a book. The hand is positioned on the left side of the frame, with fingers gripping the spine of a light-colored book. The book is being pulled out from a row of other books on a wooden shelf. The background is out of focus, showing more books and the structure of the library shelves. The overall tone is warm and focused, suggesting a quiet study environment.

PART 3

KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON STUDYING

Managing your wellbeing during revision

When it comes to exams, there's a fine line between the apprehension that keeps you motivated to keep revising, and suffering from the kind of all-encompassing stress that will negatively impact not only your revision but your general mental health.

So how do you make sure you're looking after yourself? Here's our top tips for staying in tip-top form during your revision and your exams.

1. Don't Cram!

Starting your revision early and giving yourself plenty of time to revise everything at a nice and steady pace will make last minute dashes a thing of the past and help get rid of any pre-exam anxiety.

2. "All Work and No Play..."

You need to balance work with play to stay sane during exam season; barricading yourself in your bedroom for weeks on end will make you unhappy and compromise your health. No one can study 24/7, so make sure you take regular breaks to relax and have some fun.

Even if you're reading this in a last-week-before-exams panic, remember to take regular (but short) breaks to avoid becoming frazzled.

3. Take Care of Yourself

Going to bed when the sun is coming up and existing on Red Bull and KitKat Chunkies isn't a great habit to maintain when trying to de-stress before your exams.

Make sure that you eat a healthy, varied diet that includes plenty of brain- and energy-boosting foods such as wholegrain pasta and cereal, oily fish, eggs and bananas. And stick to water to keep you hydrated and alert during your revision.

It's also important to get plenty of fresh air and exercise – both of which have long been known as powerful tools to combat stress and boost your mood, energy and concentration levels.

Exercise also has the added benefit of helping you get to sleep at night, so aim to get 30 minutes a day – a brisk walk or a gentle bike ride outside will do just fine.



4. Make Use of Your Support Network

Being stuck inside your own head for too long can encourage low moods – humans are sociable creatures and the loneliness of a day alone with maths revision might understandably take a toll on your happiness.

So, if you can find a productive way to do it, a joint revision session with friends could be really beneficial. It'll serve to remind you that everyone's in the same miserable boat, rather than you feeling as though you're suffering alone.

Don't forget that your teachers are also there to support you, so if you feel like you're struggling with your work, reach out to them for some extra help.

5. Don't Beat Yourself Up

If you end up letting your hair down and allowing Netflix to play another episode of *13 Reasons Why* (10 seconds goes surprisingly fast), don't despair over your timetable. It's no big deal, so long as you make the effort to catch up.

Equally, if you didn't finish all the questions on a maths paper, don't think "I'll never be able to pass this exam" and fuel your anxieties; learn from your mistakes and move on.

6. You Are More Than An Exam Grade

Finally, remember that exam results don't define who you are as a person. Contrary to how it might feel at the time, the exact mark you get in your exam will cease to be important extremely quickly. Clichéd though it may be, simply doing your best is all that matters.

A young woman with curly hair is hugging a blonde woman from behind in a school hallway. The woman being hugged is wearing a light blue backpack. The background is slightly blurred, showing other students and a hallway setting.

PART 4

BEAT THE 'BIG DAY' BLUES

Achieve success, no matter your results

You might be looking forward to spending endless lazy days in the park with your mates, or perhaps even a summer holiday abroad after your exams have finished. But, before you know it, Results Day – Aug 13th will be upon you.

That's right, the day of reckoning when you find out how well you've done and if you've got in to your chosen uni.

What If You Don't Get Your Grades?

Now, it's highly likely that all of your revision and hard work will have paid off, and that you'll get the grades you need to get in to your dream uni. But it always pays to be prepared for any possibility... including the possibility that you won't do as well as you hope.

If that's the case for you, then you have a couple of options available to you:

Option 1: Gap Year

Your first option is to take a year out and resit your exams next summer for entry in September 2021. Now, this isn't as bad as it may sound now...

If you are worried about doing another year of college and being seen as 'the girl/guy who's repeating a year' by your younger classmates, then you can actually study the material online.

Plus, you can spend your year doing things that not only give you great life experience, but great things to add to your uni application for next year (and your CV too)... like travelling, volunteering, or getting a job (handy for helping to pay for uni when you eventually get there).

Option 2: Clearing

Clearing is a way to find an alternative course or uni to go to if you haven't make the grades for either your first choice or insurance choice on UCAS.

Technically Clearing begins in July and continues on until September, but in reality the main action takes place on A-level Results Day (and the days immediately following).

Clearing moves quickly and this can make it extremely stressful for students. Places at top unis will go fast, so you can't hang around too long...

That's why it really does pay to prepare for the possibility of going through Clearing before the big day comes so you can take action straight away.

Spend some time over the summer to make a list of courses and/or universities that you might want to go to if you miss your grades. don't forget you can use Whatuni to research potential back up university and course choices.



Myths About Clearing - Busted!

Clearing has always been something of a taboo subject. And it's seen as something that only failures go through. But as you've just read, that is just a myth! Clearing is open for lots of different types of student in different situations. Here's seven more Clearing myths we can bust once and for all...

1. It's Impossible to Find a Uni That'll Take You

Clearing spaces are available at many different universities, Russell groups and all. They're all looking to fill their courses up, so chances are you'll find the right one for you, not just the leftovers.

2. Hardly Anyone Goes Through Clearing

Roughly 60,000 students gained uni places through Clearing last year, according to UCAS. That sounds like a whole lot of people to us...

3. Clearing Courses Are Rubbish

Any course could appear on Clearing. It is literally universities offering empty spaces on their courses. The courses aren't any less legitimate, they simply need filling up

4. You Can Only Apply for the Subject You Originally Applied For

You can apply for anything on there! It can be something similar to what you originally applied for, or something completely different, your choice.

5. You Can't Apply to Universities That Rejected You

You can apply for any course on Clearing for any uni that advertises spaces,

including the one you didn't get into originally. So, if you have your heart set on a particular destination, there may be an alternative course you like there and can apply for.

6. You Won't Get Accommodation

Accommodation rules certainly differ from uni to uni, but often students who go through Clearing are still offered decent accommodation.

7. Clearing is the End of the World

It really isn't! Honestly, you won't remember it in 5 years' time, so there's no need to lose sleep.

What If You Do Better Than You Hope?

If this happens – and well done you if it does! – you could either stick with your chosen uni.... Or you could think about going through Adjustment.

Adjustment is the same as Clearing. You'll be searching for courses from the same available course pool, but you'll be doing it as an adjuster - someone who is stepping up.

To prepare yourself for this possibility, when you are researching your backups over the summer do some research in to unis and courses you'd like to go to if you get higher grades.

Where Can You Find Available Courses During Clearing?

You can search for Clearing courses over on the [Whatuni website](#). You'll be able to quickly check out everything you need to know about a particular course or university and have access to over 140,000 student reviews to help you make your decision - all in one place.

Very handy, I'm sure you'll agree!